







TOMMY'S CHANGE OF HEART



Some cut trees, some hauled them to the dam

THE WISHING-STONE STORIES

*Tommy's Change
of Heart*

By

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Tommy's Change of Heart

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CHAPTER ONE

HOW IT HAPPENED THAT REDDY FOX GAINED A FRIEND

IT was funny that Tommy never could pass that gray stone without sitting down on it for a few minutes. It seemed as if he just couldn't, that was all. It had been a favorite seat ever since he was big enough to drive the cows to pasture and go after them at night. It was just far enough from home for him to think that he needed a rest when he reached it. You know a growing boy needs to rest often, except when

he is playing. He used to take all his troubles there to think them over. The queer part of it is he left a great many of them there, though he didn't seem to know it. If Tommy ever could have seen in one pile all the troubles he had left at that old gray stone, I am afraid that he would have called it the trouble-stone instead of the wishing-stone.

It was only lately that he had begun to call it the wishing-stone. Several times when he had been sitting on it, he had wished foolish wishes and they had come true. At least, it seemed as if they had come true. They had come as true as he ever wanted them to. He was thinking something of this kind now as he stood idly kicking at the old stone.

Presently he stopped kicking at it, and, from force of habit, sat down on it.

It was a bright, sunshiny day, one of those warm days that sometimes happen right in the middle of winter, as if the weather-man had somehow got mixed and slipped a spring day into the wrong place in the calendar.

From where he sat, Tommy could look over to the Green Forest, which was green now only where the pine-trees and the hemlock-trees and the spruce-trees grew. All the rest was bare and brown, save that the ground was white with snow. He could look across the white meadow-land to the Old Pasture, where in places the brush was so thick that, in summer, he sometimes had to hunt to find the cows. Now, even from this distance, he could trace the windings of the cow-paths, each a ribbon of

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spotless white. It puzzled him at first. He scowled at them.

"When the whole thing is covered with snow, it ought to be harder to see those paths, but instead of that it is easier," he muttered. "It isn't reasonable!" He scowled harder than ever, but the scowl wasn't an unpleasant one. You know there is a difference in scowls. Some are black and heavy, like ugly thunder-heads, and from them flashes of anger are likely to dart any minute, just as the lightning darts out from the thunder-heads. Others are like the big fleecy clouds that hide the sun for a minute or two, and make it seem all the brighter by their passing.

There are scowls of anger and scowls of perplexity. It was a scowl of the latter kind that wrinkled Tommy's fore-

head now. He was trying to understand something that seemed to him quite beyond common sense.

"It isn't reasonable!" he repeated. "I ought not to be able to see 'em at all. But I do. They stick out like ——"

No one will ever know just what they stuck out like, for Tommy never finished that sentence. The scowl cleared and his freckled face fairly beamed. He had made a discovery all by himself, and he felt all the joy of a discoverer. Perhaps you will think it wasn't much, but it was really important, so far as it concerned Tommy, because it proved that Tommy was learning to use his eyes and to understand what he saw. He had reasoned the thing out, and when anybody does that, it is always important.

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"Why, how simple!" exclaimed Tommy. "Of course I can see those old paths! It would be funny if I couldn't. The bushes break through the snow on all sides, but where the paths are, there is nothing to break through, and so they are perfectly smooth and stand right out. Queer I never noticed that before. Hello! what's that?"

His sharp eyes had caught sight of a little spot of red up in the Old Pasture. It was moving, and, as he watched it, it gradually took shape. It was Reddy Fox, trotting along one of those little white paths. Apparently, Reddy was going to keep an engagement somewhere, for he trotted along quite as if he were bound for some particular place and had no time to waste.

"He's headed this way, and, if I keep

still, perhaps he'll come close," thought Tommy.

So he sat as still as if he were part of the old wishing-stone itself. Reddy Fox came straight on. At the edge of the Old Pasture he stopped for a minute and looked across to the Green Forest, as if to make sure that it was perfectly safe to cross the Green Meadows. Evidently he thought it was, for he resumed his steady trot. If he kept on the way he was headed he would pass very near to the wishing-stone and to Tommy.

Just as he was half-way across the meadows, Chanticleer, Tommy's prize Plymouth Rock rooster, crowed over in the farmyard. Instantly Reddy stopped with one black paw uplifted and turned his head in the direction of the sound. Tommy could imagine the

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hungry look in that sharp, crafty face. But Reddy was far too wise to think of going up to the farmyard in broad daylight, and in a moment resumed his journey.

Nearer and nearer he came, until he was passing not thirty feet away. How handsome he was! His beautiful red coat looked as if the coldest wind never could get through it. His great plume of a tail, black toward the end and just tipped with white, was held high to keep it out of the snow. His black stockings, white vest, and black-tipped ears gave him a wonderfully fine appearance. Quite a dandy is Reddy Fox, and he looked it.

He was almost past when Tommy squeaked like a mouse. Like a flash Reddy turned, his sharp ears cocked for-

ward, his yellow eyes agleam with hunger. There he stood, as motionless as Tommy himself, eagerness written in every line of his face. It was very clear that, no matter how important his business in the Green Forest was, he didn't intend knowingly to pass anything so delicious as a meadow-mouse. Again Tommy squeaked. Instantly Reddy took several steps toward him, looking and listening intently. A look of doubt crept into his eager face. That old gray stone didn't look just as he remembered it. For a long minute he stared straight at Tommy. Then a puff of wind fluttered the bottom of Tommy's coat, and perhaps at the same time it carried to Reddy that dreaded man smell.

Reddy almost turned a back-somersault in his hurry to get away. Then he

ran. How he did run! In almost no time at all he had reached the Green Forest and vanished from Tommy's sight. Quite without knowing it Tommy sighed. "My, how handsome he is!" You know Tommy is freckle-faced and rather homely. "And gee, how he can run!" he added admiringly. "It must be fun to be able to run like that. It might be fun to be a fox anyhow. I wonder what it feels like. I wish I were a fox."

If he had remembered where he was, perhaps Tommy would have thought twice before wishing. But he had forgotten. Forgetting was one of Tommy's besetting sins. Hardly had the words left his mouth when Tommy found that he *was* a fox, red-coated, black-stock-



Then he ran. How he did run!



"Come on," said Reddy. "We'll have one of those chucks."

inged — the very image of Reddy himself.

And with that change in himself everything else had changed. It was summer. The Green Meadows and the Green Forest were very beautiful. Even the Old Pasture was beautiful. But Tommy had no eyes for beauty. All that beauty meant nothing to him save that now there was plenty to eat and no great trouble to get it. Everywhere the birds were singing, but if Tommy heeded at all, it was only to wish that some of the sweet songsters would come down on the ground where he could catch them.

Those songs made him hungry. He knew of nothing he liked better, next to fat meadow-mice, than birds. That reminded him that some of them nest on

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the ground, Mrs. Grouse for instance. He had little hope that he could catch her, for it seemed as if she had eyes in the back of her head; but she should have a family by this time, and if he could find those youngsters — the very thought made his mouth water, and he started for the Green Forest.

Once there, he visited one place after another where he thought he might find Mrs. Grouse. He was almost ready to give up and go back to the Green Meadows to hunt for meadow-mice when a sudden rustling in the dead leaves made him stop short and strain his ears. There was a faint "*kwitt*," and then all was still. Tommy took three or four steps and then — could he believe his eyes? — there was Mrs. Grouse flutter-

ing on the ground just in front of him! One wing dragged as if broken.

Tommy made a quick spring and then another. Somehow Mrs. Grouse just managed to get out of his way. But she couldn't fly. She couldn't run as she usually did. It was only luck that she had managed to evade him. Very stealthily he approached her as she lay fluttering among the leaves. Then, gathering himself for a long jump, he sprang.

Once more he missed her, by a mere matter of inches it seemed. The same thing happened again and still again. It was maddening to have such a good dinner so near and yet not be able to get it. Then something happened that made Tommy feel so foolish that he wanted to sneak away. With a roar

of wings Mrs. Grouse sailed up over the tree-tops and out of sight!

"Huh! Haven't you learned that trick yet?" said a voice.

Tommy turned. There was Reddy Fox grinning at him. "What trick?" he demanded.

"Why, that old Grouse was just fooling you!" replied Reddy. "There was nothing the matter with her. She was just pretending. She had a whole family of young ones hidden close by the place where you first saw her. My, but you are easy!"

"Let's go right back there!" cried Tommy.

"No use. Not the least bit," declared Reddy. "It's too late. Let's go over on the meadows and hunt for mice."

Together they trotted over to the

Green Meadows. All through the grass were private little paths made by the mice. The grass hung over them so that they were more like tunnels than paths. Reddy crouched down by one which smelled very strong of mouse. Tommy crouched down by another.

Presently there was the faint sound of tiny feet running. The grass moved ever so little over the small path Reddy was watching. Suddenly he sprang, and his two black paws came down together on something that gave a pitiful squeak. Reddy had caught a mouse without even seeing it. He had known just where to jump by the movement of the grass. Presently Tommy caught one the same way. Then, because they knew that the mice right around there were fright-

ened, they moved on to another part of the meadows.

"I know where there are some young woodchucks," said Tommy, who had unsuccessfully tried for one of them that very morning.

"Where?" demanded Reddy.

"Over by that old tree on the edge of the meadow," replied Tommy. "It isn't the least bit of use to try for them. They don't go far enough away from their hole, and their mother keeps watch all the time. There she is now."

Sure enough, there sat old Mrs. Chuck, looking, at that distance, for all the world like a stake driven in the ground.

"Come on," said Reddy. "We'll have one of those chucks."

But instead of going toward the wood-

chuck home, Reddy turned in quite the opposite direction. Tommy didn't know what to make of it, but he said nothing, and trotted along behind. When they were where Reddy knew that Mrs. Chuck could no longer see them, he stopped.

"There's no hurry," said he. "There seems to be plenty of grasshoppers here, and we may as well catch a few. When Mrs. Chuck has forgotten all about us, we'll go over there."

Tommy grinned to himself. "If he thinks we are going to get over there without being seen, he's got something to learn," thought Tommy. But he said nothing, and, for lack of anything better to do, he caught grasshoppers. After a while, Reddy said he guessed it was about time to go chuck-hunting.

"You go straight over there," said he. "When you get near, Mrs. Chuck will send all the youngsters down into their hole and then she will follow, only she'll stay where she can peep out and watch you. Go right up to the hole so that she will go down out of sight, and then wait there until I come. I'll hide right back of that tree, and then you go off as if you had given up trying to catch any of them. Go hunt meadow-mice far enough away so that she won't be afraid. I'll do the rest."

Tommy didn't quite see through the plan, but he did as he was told. As he drew near Mrs. Chuck, she did just as Reddy said she would—sent her youngsters down underground. Then, as he drew nearer, she followed them.

Tommy kept on right up to her door-

step. The smell of those chucks was maddening. He was tempted to try to dig them out, only somehow he just felt that it would be of no use. He was still half minded to try, however, when Reddy came trotting up and flattened himself in the long grass behind the trunk of the tree.

Tommy knew then that it was time for him to do the rest of his part. He turned his back on the woodchuck home, and trotted off across the meadow. He hadn't gone far when, looking back, he saw Mrs. Chuck sitting up very straight and still on her doorstep, watching him. Not once did she take her eyes from him. Tommy kept on, and presently began to hunt for meadow-mice. But he kept one eye on Mrs. Chuck, and presently he saw her look this way and that, as if

to make sure that all was well. Then she must have told her children that they could come out to play once more, for out they came. By this time Tommy was so excited that he almost forgot that he was supposed to be hunting mice.

Presently he saw a red flash from behind the old tree. There was a frightened scurry of little chucks and old Mrs. Chuck dove into her hole. Reddy barked joyfully. Tommy hurried to join him. Reddy had been quite as successful as he had boasted he would be, and was grinning.

"Didn't I tell you we'd have chuck for dinner?" said Reddy. "What one can't do, two can."

After that, Tommy and Reddy often hunted together, and Reddy taught Tommy many things. So the summer

passed with plenty to eat and nothing to worry about. Not once had he known that terrible fear—the fear of being hunted — which is so large a part of the lives of Danny Meadow Mouse and Peter Rabbit, and even Chatterer the Red Squirrel.

Instead of being afraid, he was feared. He was the hunter instead of the hunted. Day and night, for he was abroad at night quite as much as by day, he went where he pleased and did as he pleased, and was happy, for there was nothing to worry him. Having plenty to eat, he kept away from the homes of men. He had been warned that there was danger there.

At last the weather grew cold. There were no more grasshoppers. There were no more foolish young rabbits or

woodchucks or grouse, for those who had escaped had grown up and were wise and smart. Every day it grew harder to get enough to eat. The cold weather made him hungrier than ever, and now he had little time for sun-naps or idle play. He had to spend most of the time that he was awake hunting. He never knew where the next meal was coming from, as did thrifty Striped Chipmunk, and Happy Jack Squirrel, and Danny Meadow Mouse.

It was hunt, hunt, hunt, and a meal only when his wits were sharper than the wits of those he hunted. He knew now what real hunger was. He knew what it was most of the time. So when, late one afternoon, he surprised a fat hen who had strayed away from the flock behind the barn of a lonely farm, he

thought that never had he tasted anything more delicious. Thereafter he visited chicken-houses and stole many fat pullets. To him they were no more than the wild birds he hunted, only more foolish and so easily caught.

And then one morning after a successful raid on a poultry-house, he heard for the first time the voices of dogs on his trail. He, the hunter, was being hunted. At first it didn't bother him at all. He would run away and leave them far behind. So he ran, and when their voices were faint and far away, he lay down to rest.

But presently he grew uneasy. Those voices were drawing nearer. Those dogs were following his every twist and turn with their noses in his tracks, just as he had so often followed

a rabbit. For hours he ran, and still those dogs followed. He was almost ready to drop when he chanced to run along in a tiny brook, and, after he left that, he heard no more of the dogs that day. So he learned that running water broke his trail.

The next day the dogs found his trail again, and, as he ran from them through a swamp, there was a sudden flash and a dreadful noise. Something stung him sharply on the shoulder. As he looked back, he caught a glimpse of a man with something in his hands that looked like a stick with smoke coming from the end of it. That night, as he lay licking his wounds, he knew that now he, who had known no fear, would never again be free from it — the fear of man.

Little by little he learned how to fool and outwit the dogs. He learned that water destroyed his scent. He learned that dry sand did not hold it. He learned to run along stone walls and then jump far out into the field and so break his trail. He learned that, if he dashed through a flock of sheep, the foolish animals would rush around in aimless fright, and their feet would stamp out his trail. These and many other sharp tricks he learned, so that after a while he had no fear of the dogs. But his fear of man grew greater rather than less, and was with him at all times.

So all through the fall he hunted and was hunted. Then came the snow, the beautiful white snow. All day it fell, and when at night the moon came out, the earth was covered with a wonderful

white carpet. Through the Green Forest and over the meadows Tommy hunted. One lone shivering little wood-mouse he dug out of a moldering old stump, but this was only a bite. He visited one hen-house after another, only to find each without so much as a loose board by means of which he might get in. It was dreadful to be so hungry.

As if this were not enough, the breaking of the day brought the sound of dogs on his trail. "I'll fool them in short order," thought he.

Alas! Running in the snow was a very different matter from running on the bare ground. One trick after another he tried, the very best he knew, the ones which never had failed before; but all in vain. Wherever he stepped he left a footprint plain to see. Though

he might fool the noses of the dogs, he could not fool the eyes of their masters.

Now one thing he had long ago learned, and this was never to seek his underground den unless he must, for then the dogs and the hunters would know where he lived. So now Tommy ran and ran, hoping to fool the dogs, but not able to. At last he realized this, and started for his den. He felt that he had to. Running in the snow was hard work. His legs ached with weariness. His great plume of a tail, of which he was so proud, was a burden now. It had become wet with the snow and so heavy that it hampered and tired him.

A great fear, a terrible fear, filled Tommy's heart. Would he be able to reach that snug den in time? He was

panting hard for breath, and his legs moved slower and slower. The voices of the dogs seemed to be in his very ears. Glancing back over his shoulder, he could see them gaining with every jump, the fierce joy of the hunt and the lust of killing in their eyes. He knew now the feeling, the terror and dreadful hopelessness of the meadow-mice and rabbits he had so often run down. Just ahead was a great gray rock. From it he would make one last long jump in an effort to break the trail. In his fear he quite forgot that he was in plain sight now, and that his effort would be useless.

Up on the rock he leaped wearily, and — Tommy rubbed his eyes. Then he pinched himself to make quite sure that he was really himself. He shivered,

for he was in a cold sweat — the sweat of fear. Before him stretched the snow-covered meadows, and away over beyond was the Old Pasture with the cow-paths showing like white ribbons. Half-way across the meadows, running toward him with their noses to the ground and making the echoes ring with the joy of the hunt, were two hounds. A dark figure moving on the edge of the Old Pasture caught his eyes and held them. It was a hunter. Reddy Fox, handsome, crafty Reddy, into whose hungry yellow eyes he had looked so short a time before, would soon be running for his life.

Hastily Tommy jumped to his feet and hurried over to the trail Reddy had made as he ran for the Green Forest. With eager feet he kicked the snow over

those telltale tracks for a little way. He waited for those eager hounds, and when they reached the place where he had broken the trail, he drove them away. They and the hunter might pick up the trail again in the Green Forest, but at least Reddy would have time to get a long start of them and a good chance of getting away altogether.

Then he went back to the wishing-stone and looked down at it thoughtfully. "And I actually wished I could be a fox!" he exclaimed. "My, but I'm glad I'm not! I guess Reddy has trouble enough without me making him any more. He may kill a lot of innocent little creatures, but he has to live, and it's no more than men do." (He was thinking of the chicken dinner he would have that day.) "I'm going straight

over to the Old Pasture and take up that trap I set yesterday. I guess a boy's troubles don't amount to much after all. I'm more glad than ever that I'm a boy, and — and — well, if Reddy Fox is smart enough to get one of my chickens now and then, he's welcome. It must be awful to be hungry all the time."

CHAPTER TWO

TOMMY BECOMES A FURRY ENGINEER

PADDY THE BEAVER lives in the Great Woods far from the dwelling-place of man. Often and often had Tommy wished that Paddy lived in the Green Forest near his home that he might make his acquaintance; for he had read many wonderful things about Paddy, and they were hard to believe.

“If I could see ’em for myself, just *see* ’em with my own eyes I could believe; but so many things are written that are not true that a feller doesn’t know what to believe and what not to. A feller ought to *see* things to *know* that

they are so," said Tommy, as he strolled down towards the big gray stone that overlooked the Green Meadows.

"'Course it's easy enough to believe that beavers build houses. Muskrats do that. I know all about muskrats, and I s'pose a beaver's house is about the same thing as a muskrat's, only bigger and better; but how any animal can cut down a big tree, or build a dam, or dig a regular canal is more than I can understand without seeing for myself. I wish ——"

Tommy didn't finish his wish. I suspect he was going to wish that he could go into the Great Woods and hunt for Paddy the Beaver. But he didn't finish his wish, because just then a new thought popped into his head. You know how it is with thoughts. They

just pop out from nowhere in the queerest way. It was so now with Tommy. He suddenly thought of the wishing-stone, the great gray stone just ahead of him, and he wondered, if he should sit down on it, if he could wish himself into a beaver. Always before, when he had wished himself into an animal or a bird, it was one of those with which he was familiar and had seen. This case was different. There were no beavers anywhere near where Tommy lived, and so he was a little doubtful. If he could wish himself into a beaver, why, he could wish himself into anything — a lion, or an elephant, or anything else — and learn about *all* the animals, no matter where they lived!

“Gee!” exclaimed Tommy, and there was a queer little catch in his breath,

because, you know, it was such a big idea. He stood still and slowly rubbed the bare toes of one foot up and down the other bare brown leg. "Gee!" he exclaimed again, and stared very hard at the wishing-stone. "'Twon't do any harm to try it, anyway," he added.

So he walked over to the wishing-stone and sat down. With his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees he stared over at the Green Forest and tried to imagine that it was the Great Woods, where the only human beings ever seen were hunters, or trappers, or lumbermen, and where bears, and deer, and moose, and wolves lived, and where beavers built their homes, and made their ponds, and lived their lives far from the homes of men. As he stared, the Green Forest seemed to change to

the Great Woods. "I wish," said he, slowly and dreamily, "I wish that I were a beaver."

He was no longer sitting on the wishing-stone. He was a young beaver with a waterproof fur coat, a broad flat tail and great chisel-like teeth in the front of his jaws, his tools. His home was in the heart of the Great Woods, where a broad, shallow brook sparkled and dimpled, and the sun, breaking through the tree-tops, kissed its ripples. In places it flowed swiftly, dancing and singing over stones and pebbles. Again it lingered in deep dark cool holes where the trout lay. Farther on, it loafed lazily through wild meadows where the deer delighted to come. But where Tommy was, it rested in little ponds, quiet, peaceful, in a dreamy stillness,

where the very spirit of peace and happiness and contentment seemed to brood.

On one side of one of these little ponds was the house, a great house of sticks bound together with mud and turf, the house in which Tommy lived with others of his family. It was quite the finest beaver-house in all that region. But Tommy didn't think anything about that. It was summer now, the season of play, of having a good time without thought of work. It was the season of visiting and of exploration. In company with some of his relatives he made long journeys up and down the brook, and even across to other brooks on some of which were other beaver colonies and on some of which were no

signs that beavers ever had worked there.

But when summer began to wane, Tommy found that life was not all a lazy holiday and that he was expected to work. The home settlement was rather crowded. There was danger that the food supply would not be sufficient for so many hungry beavers.

So it was decided to establish a new settlement on one of the brooks which they had visited in their summer journey, and Tommy was one of a little company which, under the leadership of a wise old beaver, started forth on a still night to found the new colony. He led the way straight to one of the brooks on the banks of which grew many aspen trees, for you must know that the favorite food of beavers is the bark of

aspens and poplars. It was very clear that this wise old leader had taken note during the summer of those trees and of the brook itself, for the very night of their arrival he chose a certain place in the brook and announced that there they would build their dam.

“Isn’t it a great deal of work to build a dam?” asked Tommy, who knew nothing about dam-building, the dam at his old home having been built long before his time.

“It is. Yes, indeed, it certainly is,” replied an old beaver. “You’ll find it so before we get this dam built.”

“Then what’s the use of building it?” asked Tommy. “I don’t see the use of a dam here anyway. There are places where the banks are steep enough and the water deep enough for splendid

holes in which to live. Then all we've got to do is to go cut a tree when we are hungry. I'm sure I, for one, would much rather swim around and have a good time."

The other looked at him out of eyes that twinkled, and yet in a way to make Tommy feel uncomfortable. "You are young," said he, "and the prattle of young tongues is heedless. What would you do for food in winter when the brook is frozen? The young think only of to-day and the good times of to-day, and forget to prepare for the future. When you have learned to work, you will find that there is in life no pleasure so great as the pleasure of work well done. Now suppose you let us see what those teeth of yours are good for, and help cut these alders and

haul them over to the place where the dam is to be."

Tommy had no reply ready, and so he set to work cutting young alders and willows as the rest were doing. These were floated or dragged down to the place chosen for the dam, where the water was very shallow, and were laid side by side with the big ends pointing up stream. Turf, and stones, and mud were piled on the brushy ends to keep them in place. So the foundations of the dam were laid from bank to bank. Then more poles were laid on top and more turf and mud. Short sticks were wedged in between and helped to hold the long sticks in place. Tommy grew tired of working, but no one else stopped and he was ashamed to.

One of his companions cut a big pop-

lar and others helped him trim off the branches. This was for food; and when the branches and trunk had been stripped of bark, they were floated down to the new dam and worked into it, the trunk being cut into lengths which could be managed easily. Thus nothing went to waste.

So all through the stillly night they worked, and, when the day broke, they sought the deep water and certain holes under the banks wherein to rest. But before he left the dam, the wise old leader examined the work all over to make sure that it was right.

When the first shadows crept forth late the next afternoon, the old leader was the first back on the work. One by one the others joined him, and another night of labor had begun. Some cut

trees and saplings, some hauled them to the dam, and some dug up turf and mud and piled it on the dam. There was no talking. Everybody was too busy to talk.

Most of Tommy's companions had helped build dams before and knew just what to do. Tommy asked no questions, but did as the others did. Slowly the dam grew higher, and Tommy noticed that the brook was spreading out into a pool; for the water came down faster than it could work its way through that pile of poles and brush. Twigs, and leaves, and grass floated down from the places higher up where the beavers were at work, and, when these reached the dam, they were carried in amongst the sticks by the water and lodged there,

helping to fill up the holes and hold the water back.

As night after night the dam grew higher and the pool behind it grew broader and deeper, Tommy began to take pride in his work. He no longer thought of play but was as eager as the others to complete the dam. The stars looked down from the soft sky and twinkled as they saw the busy workers.

At last the dam was completed, for the time being at least. Very thoroughly the wise old leader went all over it, inspecting it from end to end; and when he was satisfied, he led his band to one side of the little pond formed by the dam, and there he chose a site for the house wherein they would spend the winter.

First a platform of sticks, and mud,

and turf was built until it was a few inches above the water. Then began the raising of the walls, a mass of brush and turf until the walls were three feet thick and so solid that Jack Frost would find it quite useless to try to get inside. The roof was in the shape of a rough dome and at the top was comparatively thin; here little or no mud was used, so that there were tiny air-holes, for, like all other warm-blooded animals, a beaver must breathe.

Within, was a comfortable room of which the platform was the floor. From this, two burrows, or tunnels, led down on the deep-water side, one of these being on a gradual incline, that food sticks might the easier be dragged in. The entrances to both were at the very bottom of the pond, where there would be

no danger of them being closed by ice when the pond should freeze in winter. These were the only entrances, so that no foe could reach them unless he were able to swim under water, and there were no such swimmers whom they had cause to fear.

When the house was finished, Tommy thought that their labors would be at an end; and he was almost sorry, for he had learned to love work. But no sooner was the house completed than all the beavers went lumbering. Yes, sir, that is just what they did. They went lumbering just as men do, only they cut the trees for food instead of for boards.

They began at the edge of a little grove of aspens to which the pond now nearly extended. Sitting on his haunches with his broad tail for a seat

or a prop, as his fancy pleased, each little woodsman grasped the tree with his hands and bit into the trunk, a bite above and a bite below, and then with his teeth pried out the chip between the two bites, exactly as a man with an ax would cut. It was slow hard work cutting out a chip at a time in this way, but sooner or later the tree would begin to sway. A bite or two more, and it would begin to topple over.

Then the little workman would thud the ground sharply with his tail to warn his neighbors to get out of the way, and he himself would scamper to a place of safety while the tree came crashing down. Tommy dearly loved to see and hear those trees come crashing to the ground.

No sooner was a tree down than they

trimmed off the branches and cut the trunk into short lengths. These logs they rolled into the water, where, with the larger branches, they were floated out to deep water close by the house and there sunk to the bottom. What for? Tommy didn't have to be told. This was the beginning of their food-pile for the winter.

So the days slipped away and the great food-pile grew in the pond. With such busy workers it did not take long to cut all the trees close by the pond. The farther away from the water they got, the greater the labor of dragging and rolling the logs, and also the greater danger from lurking enemies. In the water they felt wholly safe, but on land they had to be always on the watch for wolves, and bears, and lynxes.

When they had reached the limit of safety, the wise old leader called a halt to tree cutting and set them all to digging. And what do you think it was they were digging? Why, a canal! It was easier and safer to lead the water from the pond to the place where the trees grew than to get the logs over land to the pond. So they dug a ditch, or canal, about two and a half feet wide and a foot and a half deep, piling the mud up on the banks, until at last it reached the place where they could cut the trees, and roll the logs into the canal, and so float them out to the pond. Then the cutting began again.

Tommy was happy. Never had he been more happy. There was something wonderfully satisfying in just looking at the results of their labor and

in feeling that he had had a part in it all. Yet his life was not all labor without excitement. Indeed, it was far from it. Had Tommy the Beaver been able to remember what as Tommy the Boy he had read, he would have felt that he was just like those hardy pioneers who built their homes in the wilderness.

Always, in that great still wilderness, death with padded feet and cruel teeth and hungry eyes sought to steal upon the beavers. So always as they worked, especially when on the land, they were prepared to rush for safety at the first warning. Never for a minute did they cease to keep guard, testing every breath of air with wonderfully sensitive noses, and listening with hardly less wonderful ears. On nose and ears the safety of a

beaver almost wholly depends, his eyes being rather weak.

Once Tommy stopped in his labor of cutting a big tree so that he might rest for a minute or two. On the very edge of the little clearing they had made, the moonlight fell on an old weather-gray log. Tommy stared at it a moment, then resumed his work. A few minutes later he chanced to look at it again. Somehow it seemed nearer than before. He stared long and hard, but it lay as motionless as a log should. Once more he resumed his work, but hardly had he done so when there was the warning thud of a neighbor's tail. Instantly Tommy scrambled for the water; and even as he did so, he caught a glimpse of that gray old log coming to life and

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leaping toward him. The instant he reached the water, he dived.

"What was it?" he whispered tremulously when, in the safety of the house, he touched noses with one of his neighbors.

"Tufty the Lynx," was the reply. "I smelled him and gave the warning. I guess it was lucky for you that I did."

"I guess it was," returned Tommy, with a shiver.

Another time, a huge black form sprang from the blacker shadows and caught one of the workers. It was a bear. Sometimes there would be three or four alarms in a night. So Tommy learned that the harvesting of the food supply was the most dangerous labor of all, for it took him farthest from the safety of the water.

At last this work was completed, and Tommy wondered if now they were to rest and idle away their time. But he did not have to wonder long. The old leader was not yet content, but must have the pond deepened all along the foot of the dam and around the entrances to the house. So now they once more turned to digging, this time under water, bringing the mud up to put on the dam or the house, some working on one and some on the other.

The nights grew crisp and there was a hint of frost. It was then that they turned all their attention to the house, plastering it all over with mud save at the very top, where the air-holes were. So thick did they lay it on that only here and there did the end of a stick project. Then came a night which made a thin

sheet of ice over the pond and froze the mud-plaster of the house. The cold increased. The ice grew thicker and the walls of the house so hard that not even the powerful claws of a bear could tear them open. It was for this that that last coating of mud had been put on.

The nights of labor were over at last. There was nothing to do now but sleep on the soft beds of grass or of thin splinters of wood, for some had preferred to make beds of this latter material. For exercise they swam in the quiet waters under the ice. When they were hungry, they slipped down through the water tunnel and out into the pond, swam to the food-pile, got a stick, and took it back to the house, where they gnawed the bark off in comfort and at their ease, afterward carrying the bare

stick down to the dam for use in making repairs.

Once they discovered that the water was rapidly lowering. This meant a break in the dam. A trapper had cut a hole in it and cunningly placed a trap there. But the wise old leader knew all about traps, and the breach was repaired without harm to any one. Sometimes a lynx or a wolf would come across the ice and prowl around the house, sniffing hungrily as the smell of beaver came out through the tiny air-holes in the roof. But the thick walls were like rock, and Tommy and his companions never even knew of these hungry prowlers. Peace, safety, and contentment reigned under the ice of the beaver-pond.

But at last there came a day when a great noise reverberated under the ice.

They knew not what it meant and lay shivering with fear. A long time they lay even after it had ceased. Then one of the boldest went for a stick from the food-pile. He did not return. Another went and he did not return. Finally Tommy went, for he was hungry. When he reached the food-pile, he found that it had been fenced in with stout poles driven down into the mud through holes cut in the ice. It was the cutting of these holes that had made the dreadful noise, though Tommy didn't know it.

Around the food-pile he swam until at last he found an opening between the poles of the fence. He hesitated. Then because he was very hungry, he entered. Hardly was he inside when another pole was thrust down through a hole behind

him, and he was a prisoner under the ice inside that hateful fence.

Now a beaver must have air, and there was no air there and no way of getting any. Up above on the ice an Indian squatted. He knew just what was happening down below and he grinned. Beside him lay the two beavers who had preceded Tommy, drowned. Now Tommy was drowning. His lungs felt as if they would burst. Dully he realized that this was the end. As long as he could, he held his breath and then — Tommy came to himself with a frightened jump.

He was sitting on the old wishing-stone, and before him stretched the Green Meadows, joyous with happy life. He wasn't a beaver at all, but he knew that he had been a beaver, that he had

lived the life of Paddy the Beaver. He could remember every detail of it, and he shuddered as he thought of those last dreadful minutes at the food-pile when he had felt himself drowning helplessly. Then the wonder of what he had learned grew upon him.

"Why," he exclaimed, "a beaver is an engineer, a lumberman, a dredger, a builder, and a mason! He's wonderful. He's the most wonderful animal in all the world!" His face clouded. "Why can't people leave him alone?" he exploded. "A man that will trap and kill one of those little chaps is worse than a lynx or a wolf. Yes, sir, that's what he is! Those creatures kill to eat, but man kills just for the few dollars Paddy's fur coat will bring. When I grow up, I'm going to do something to

stop trapping and killing. Yes, sir, that's what I'm going to do!"

Tommy got up and stretched. Then he started for home, and there was a thoughtful look on his freckled face. "Gee!" he exclaimed, "I've learned a pile this time. I didn't know there was so much pleasure in just work before. I guess I won't complain any more over what I have to do. I — I'm mighty glad I was a beaver for a little while, just for that."

And then, whistling, Tommy headed straight for the wood-pile and his ax. He had work to do, and he was glad of it.

CHAPTER THREE

WHY TOMMY TOOK UP ALL HIS TRAPS

IF there was one thing that Tommy enjoyed above another, it was trapping. There were several reasons why he enjoyed it. In the first place, it took him out of doors with something definite to do. He loved the meadows and the woods and the pastures, and all the beauties of them with which Old Mother Nature is so lavish.

He loved to tramp along the Laughing Brook and around the Smiling Pool. Always, no matter what the time of the year, there was something interesting to see. Now it was a flower new to him, or a bird that he had not seen before.

Again it was a fleeting glimpse of one of the shy, fleet-footed little people who wear coats of fur. He liked these best of all because they were the hardest to surprise and study in their home life. And that was one reason why he enjoyed trapping so much. It was matching his wits against their wits. And one other reason was the money which he got for the pelts.

So Tommy was glad when the late fall came and it was time to set traps and every morning make his rounds to see what he had caught. In the coldest part of the winter, when the snow was deep and the ice was thick, he stopped trapping, but he began again with the beginning of spring when the Laughing Brook was once more set free and the Smiling Pool no longer locked in icy fet-

ters. It was then that the muskrats and the minks became most active, and their fur coats were still at their best. You see the more active they were, the more likely they were to step into one of his traps.

On this particular afternoon, after school, Tommy had come down to the Smiling Pool to set a few extra traps for muskrats. The trapping season, that is the season when the fur was still at its best, or "prime," as the fur dealers call it, would soon be at an end. He had set a trap on an old log which lay partly in and partly out of the water. He knew that the muskrats used this old log to sun themselves because one had plunged off it as he came up. So he set a trap just under water on the end of the old log where the first muskrat who

tried to climb out there would step in it.

"I'll get one here, as sure as shooting," said Tommy.

Then he found a little grassy tussock, and he knew by the matted-down grass that it was a favorite resting place for muskrats. Here he set another trap and left some slices of carrot as bait.

By the merest accident, he found a hole in the bank and, from the look of it, he felt sure that it had been made by one of the furry little animals he wanted to catch. Right at the very entrance he set another trap, and artfully covered it with water-soaked leaves from the bottom of the Smiling Pool so that it could not be seen.

"I'd like to see anything go in or out of that hole without getting caught," said he, with an air of being mightily

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tickled with himself and his own smartness.

So he went on until he had set all his traps, and all the time he was very happy. Spring had come, and it is everybody's right to be happy in the spring. He heard the joyous notes of the first birds who had come on the lagging heels of winter from the warm southland, and they made him want to sing, himself. Everything about him proclaimed new life and the joy of living. He could feel it in the very air. It was good to be alive.

After the last trap had been put in place, he sat down on an old log to rest for a few minutes and enjoy the scene. The Smiling Pool was as smooth as polished glass. Presently, as Tommy sat there without moving, two little silver

lines, which met and formed a V, started on the farther side of the Smiling Pool and came straight toward him. Tommy knew what those silver lines were. They were the wake made by a swimming muskrat.

“My! I wish I’d brought my gun!” thought Tommy. “It’s queer how a fellow always sees things when he hasn’t a gun, and never sees them when he has.”

He could perceive the little brown head very plainly now, and, as it drew nearer, he could distinguish the outline of the body just under the surface, and back of that the queer, rubbery, flattened tail set edge-wise in the water and moving rapidly from side to side.

“It’s a regular propeller,” thought Tommy, “and he certainly knows how

to use it. It sculls him right along. If he should lose that, he sure would be up against it!"

Tommy moved ever so little, so as to get a better view. Instantly there was a sharp slap of the tail on the water, a plunge, and only a ripple to show that a second before there had been a swimmer there. Two other slaps and plunges sounded from distant parts of the Smiling Pool and Tommy knew that he would see no more muskrats unless he sat very still for a long time. Slowly he got to his feet, stretched, and then started for home. All the way across the Green Meadows he kept thinking of that little glimpse of muskrat life he had had, and for the first time in his life he began to think that there might be something more interesting about a

muskrat than his fur coat. Always before, he had thought of a muskrat as simply a rat, a big, overgrown cousin of the pests that stole the grain in the hen-house, and against whom every man's hand is turned, as it should be.

But somehow that little glimpse of Jerry Muskrat at home had awakened a new interest. It struck him quite suddenly that it was a very wonderful thing that an animal breathing air, just as he did himself, could be so at home in the water and disappear so suddenly and completely.

"It must be fine to be able to swim like that!" thought Tommy as he sat down on the wishing-stone, and looked back across the Green Meadows to the Smiling Pool. "I wonder what he does down there under water. Now I think

of it, I don't know much about him except that he is the only rat with a fur that is good for anything. If it wasn't for that fur coat of his, I don't suppose anybody would bother him. What a snap he would have then! I guess he has no end of fun in the summer, with nothing to worry about and plenty to eat, and always cool and comfortable no matter what the weather!

"What gets me is how he spends the winter when everything is frozen. He must be under the ice for weeks. I wonder if he sleeps the way the woodchuck does. I suppose I can find out just by wishing, seeing that I'm sitting right here on the old wishing-stone. It would be a funny thing to do to wish myself into a rat. It doesn't seem as if there could be anything very interesting about

the life of anything so stupid-looking as a muskrat, and yet I've thought the same thing about some other creatures and found I was wrong."

He gazed dreamily down toward the Smiling Pool, and, the longer he looked, the more he wondered what it would be like to live there. At last, almost without knowing it, he said the magic words.

"I — I wish I were a muskrat!" he murmured.

Tommy was in the Smiling Pool. He was little and fur-coated, with a funny little flattened tail. And he really had two coats, the outer of long hairs, a sort of water-proof, while the under coat was soft and fine and meant to keep him warm. And, though he was swimming with only his head out of water, he wasn't wet at all.

It was a beautiful summer evening, just at the hour of twilight, and the Smiling Pool was very beautiful, the most beautiful place that ever was. At least it seemed so to Tommy. In the bulrushes a few little feathered folks were still twittering sleepily. Over on his big green lily-pad Grandfather Frog was leading the frog chorus in a great deep voice. From various places in the Smiling Pool came sharp little squeaks and faint splashes. It was playtime for little muskrats and visiting time for big muskrats.

An odor of musk filled the air and was very pleasant to Tommy as he sniffed and sniffed. He was playing hide-and-seek and tag with other little muskrats of his own age, and not one of them had a care in all the world. Far away,



It was playtime for little muskrats



Tommy went calling on his neighbors

Hooty the Owl was sending forth his fierce hunting call, but no one in the Smiling Pool took the least notice of it. By and by it ceased.

Tommy was chasing one of his playmates in and out among the bulrushes. Twice they had been warned by a wise old muskrat not to go beyond the line of bulrushes into the open water. But little folks are forgetful, especially when playing. Tommy's little playmate forgot. In the excitement of getting away from Tommy he swam out where the first little star was reflected in the Smiling Pool. A shadow passed over Tommy and hardly had it passed when there was a sharp slap of something striking the water.

Tommy knew what it was. He knew that it was the tail of some watchful old

muskrat who had discovered danger, and that it meant "dive at once." Tommy dived. He didn't wait to learn what the danger was, but promptly filled his little lungs with air, plunged under water and swam as far as he could. When he just had to come up for more air, he put only his nose out and this in the darkest place he knew of among the rushes.

There he remained perfectly still. Down inside, his heart was thumping with fear of he knew not what. There wasn't a sound to be heard around the Smiling Pool. It was as still as if there was no living thing there. After what seemed like a long, long time, the deep voice of Grandfather Frog boomed out, and then the squeak of the old muskrat who had given the alarm told all within

hearing that all was safe again. At once, all fear left Tommy and he swam to find his playmates.

"What was it?" he asked one of them.

"Hooty, the Owl," was the reply.

"Didn't you see him?"

"I saw a shadow," replied Tommy.

"That was Hooty. I wonder if he caught anybody," returned the other.

Tommy didn't say anything, but he thought of the playmate who forgot and swam out beyond the bulrushes, and, when he had hunted and hunted and couldn't find him, he knew that Hooty had not visited the Smiling Pool for nothing.

So Tommy learned the great lesson of never being careless and forgetting. Later that same night, as he sat on a little muddy platform on the edge of the

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water eating a delicious tender young lily-root, there came that same warning slap of a tail on the water. Tommy didn't wait for even one more nibble, but plunged into the deepest water and hid as before. This time when the signal that all was well was given he learned that some one with sharper ears than his had heard the footsteps of a fox on the shore and had given the warning just in the nick of time.

Four things Tommy learned that night. First, that, safe and beautiful as it seems, the Smiling Pool is not free from dangers for little muskrats; second, that forgetfulness means a short life; third, that to dive at the instant a danger-signal is sounded and inquire later what the danger was is the only sure way of being safe; and fourth, that it is

the duty of every muskrat who detects danger to warn every other muskrat.

Though he didn't realize it then, this last was the most important lesson of all. It was the great lesson that human beings have been so long learning, and which many have not learned yet, that, just in proportion as each one looks out for the welfare of his neighbors, he is himself better off. Instead of having just one pair of little eyes and one pair of keen little ears to guard him against danger Tommy had many pairs of little eyes and little ears keeping guard all the time, some of them better than his own.

Eating, sleeping, and playing, and of course watching out for danger, were all that Tommy had to think about through the long lazy summer, and he

grew and grew and grew until he was as big as the biggest muskrats in the Smiling Pool, and could come and go as he pleased.

There was less to fear now from Hooty the Owl, for Hooty prefers tender young muskrats. He had learned all about the ways of Reddy Fox, and feared him not at all. He had learned where the best lily-roots grow, and how to find and open mussels, those clams which live in fresh water. He had a favorite old log, half in the water, to which he brought these to open them and eat them, and more than one fight did he have before his neighbors learned to respect this as his. He had explored all the shore of the Smiling Pool and knew every hole in the banks. He had even been some distance up the Laugh-

ing Brook. Life was very joyous.

But, as summer began to wane, the days to grow shorter and the nights longer, he discovered that playtime was over. At least, all his friends and neighbors seemed to think so, for they were very, very busy. Something inside told him that it was time, high time, that he also went to work. Cold weather was coming and he must be prepared. For one thing he must have a comfortable home, and the only way to get one was to make one for himself.

Of course this meant work, but somehow Tommy felt that he would feel happier if he did work. He was tired of doing nothing in particular. In his roamings about, he had seen many muskrat homes, some of them old and deserted, and some of them visited while the

owners were away. He knew just what a first-class house should be like. It should be high enough in the bank to be above water at all times, even during the spring floods, and it should be reached by a passage the entrance to which should at all times be under water, even in the driest season.

On the bank of the Smiling Pool grew a tree, and the spreading roots came down so that some of them were in the Smiling Pool itself. Under them, Tommy made the entrance to his burrow. The roots hid it. At first the digging was easy, for the earth was little more than mud; but, as the passage slanted up, the digging became harder. Still he kept at it. Two or three times he stopped and decided that he had gone far enough, then changed his mind and

kept on. At last he found a place to suit him, and there he made a snug chamber not very far under the grass-roots.

When he had finished it, he was very proud of it. He told Jerry Muskrat about it. "Have you more than one entrance to it?" asked Jerry.

"No," replied Tommy, "it was hard enough work to make that one."

Jerry turned up his nose. "That wouldn't do for me," he declared. "A house with only one entrance is nothing but a trap. Supposing a fierce old mink should find that doorway while you were inside; what would you do then?"

Tommy hadn't thought of that. Once more he went to work, and made another long tunnel leading up to that snug chamber; and then, perhaps because he had got the habit, he made a

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third. From one of these tunnels he even made a short branch with a carefully hidden opening right out on the meadow, for Tommy liked to prowl around on land once in a while. The chamber he lined with grass and old rushes until he had a very comfortable bed.

With all this hard work completed, you would have supposed that Tommy would have been satisfied, wouldn't you? But he wasn't. He found that some of his neighbors were building houses of a wholly different kind, and right away he decided that he must have one too. So he chose a place where the water was shallow, and not too far from the place where the water-lilies grew; and there among the bulrushes he once more set to work.

This time he dug out the mud and the roots of the rushes, piling them around him until he was in a sort of little well. From this he dug several tunnels leading to the deep water where he could be sure that the entrance never would be frozen over. The mud and sods he piled up until they came above the water, and then he made a platform of rushes and mud with an opening in the middle down into that well from which his tunnels led. On this platform he built a great mound of rushes, and grass, and even twigs, all wattled together. Some of them he had to bring clear from the other side of the Smiling Pool.

And, as he built that mound, he made a nice large room in the middle, biting off all the ends of sticks and rushes

which happened to be in the way. When he had made that room to suit him, he made a comfortable bed there, just as he had in the house in the bank. Then he built the walls very thick, adding rushes and mud and sods all around except on the very top. There he left the roof thinner, with little spaces for the air to get in, for of course he must have fresh air to breathe.

When at last the new house was finished, he was very proud of it. There were two rooms, the upper one with its comfortable bed quite above the water, and the lower one wholly under water, connected with the former by a little doorway. The only way of getting into the house was by one of his tunnels to the lower room. When all was done, an old muskrat looked it over and told

him that he had done very well for a young fellow, which made Tommy feel very important.

The weather was growing cool now, so Tommy laid up some supplies in both houses and then spent his spare time calling on his neighbors. By this time he had grown a fine thick coat and didn't mind at all how cold it grew. In fact he liked the cold weather.

It was about this time that he had a dreadful experience. He climbed out one evening on his favorite log to open and eat a mussel he had found. There was a snap, and something caught him by the tail and pinched dreadfully. He pulled with all his might, but the dreadful thing wouldn't let go. He turned and bit at it, but it was harder than his

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teeth and gnaw as he would he could make no impression on it.

A great terror filled his heart and he struggled and pulled, heedless of the pain, until he was too tired to struggle longer. He just had to lie still. After a while, when he had regained his strength, he struggled again. This time he felt his tail give a little. A neighbor swam over to see what all the fuss was about.

"It's a trap," said he. "It's lucky you are not caught by a foot instead of by the tail. If you keep on pulling you may get free. I did once."

This gave Tommy new hope and he struggled harder than ever. At last he fell headlong into the water. The cruel steel jaws had not been able to keep his tapered tail from slipping be-

tween them. He was free, but oh, so frightened!

After that Tommy grew wise. He never went ashore without first examining the place for one of those dreadful traps, and he found more than one. It got so that he gave up all his favorite places and made new ones. Once he found one of his friends caught by a forefoot and he was actually cutting his foot off with his sharp teeth. It was dreadful, but it was the only way of saving his life.

Those were sad and terrible times around the Smiling Pool and along the Laughing Brook for the people in fur, but there didn't seem to be anything they could do about it except to everlastingly watch out.

One morning Tommy awoke to find

the Smiling Pool covered with ice. He liked it. A sense of great peace fell on the Smiling Pool. There was no more danger from traps except around certain spring holes, and there was no need of going there. Much of the time Tommy slept in that fine house of rushes and mud. Its walls had frozen solid and it was as comfortable as could be imagined. A couple of friends who had no house stayed with him.

When they were hungry all they had to do was to drop down into the tunnel leading to deep water and so out into the Smiling Pool under the ice, dig up a lily-root and swim back and eat it in comfort inside the house. If they got short of air while swimming under the ice they were almost sure to find little air spaces under the edge of the banks.

No matter how bitter the cold or how wild the storm above the ice,—below it was always calm and the temperature never changed.

Sometimes Tommy went over to his house in the bank. Once, while he was there, a bloodthirsty mink followed him. Tommy heard him coming and escaped down one of the other passages. Then he was thankful indeed that he had made more than one. But this was his only adventure all the long winter. At last spring came, the ice disappeared and the water rose in the Laughing Brook until it was above the banks, and in the Smiling Pool until Tommy's house was nearly under water. Then he moved over to his house in the bank and was comfortable again.

One day he swam over to his house

of rushes and climbed up on the top. He had no thought of danger there and he was heedless. Snap! A trap set right on top of the house held him fast by one leg. A mist swam before his eyes as he looked across the Green Meadows and heard the joyous carol of Welcome Robin. Why, oh why, should there be such misery in the midst of so much joy? He was trying to make up his mind to lose his foot when, far up on the edge of the meadows, he saw an old gray rock. Somehow the sight of it brought a vague sense of comfort to him. He strained his eyes to see it better and — Tommy was just himself, rubbing his eyes as he sat on the old wishing-stone.

“— I was just going to cut my foot off. Ugh!” he shuddered. “Two or

three times I've found a foot in my traps, but I never realized before what it really meant. Why, those little chaps had more nerve than I'll ever have!"

He gazed thoughtfully down toward the Smiling Pool. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet and began to run toward it. "It's too late to take all of 'em up to-night," he muttered, "but I'll take what I can, and to-morrow morning I'll take up the rest. I hope nothing will get caught in 'em. I never knew before how dreadful it must be to be caught in a trap. I'll never set another trap as long as I live, so there!"

"Why, Jerry Muskrat is almost as wonderful as Paddy the Beaver, and he doesn't do anything a bit of harm. I didn't know he was so interesting. He hasn't as many troubles as some, but he

has enough, I guess, without me adding to them. Say, that's a great life he leads! If it wasn't for traps, it wouldn't be half bad to be a muskrat. Of course it's better to be a boy, but I can tell you right now I'm going to be a better boy — less thoughtless and cruel. Jerry Muskrat, you haven't anything more to fear from me, not a thing! I take off my hat to you for a busy little worker, and for having more nerve than any *boy* I know."

And never again did Tommy set a trap for little wild folk.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOMMY LEARNS WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE A BEAR

TOMMY'S thoughts were straying. Somehow they were straying most of the time these days. They had been, ever since that day when he had wished himself into a beaver. He dreamed of the Great Woods where rivers have their beginnings in gurgling brooks, and great lakes reflect moss-gray giants of the forest; where the beavers still ply their many trades unharmed by man, the deer follow paths of their own making, the otters make merry on their slippery-slides, the lynx pass through the dark shadows, themselves

but grayer shadows, and bears go fishing, gather berries, and hunt the stored sweets of the bees. In short, the spell of the Great Woods, the wilderness unmarred by the hand of man, was upon Tommy.

Eagerly he read all that he could find about the feathered and furred folk who dwell there, and the longing to know more about them and their ways, to learn these things for himself, grew and grew. He wanted to hear things with his own ears and see things with his own eyes.

Sometimes he went over to the Green Forest near his home and played that it was the Great Woods and that he was a mighty hunter. Then Happy Jack the Gray Squirrel became a fierce-eyed, tufted-eared, bob-tailed lynx, saucy

Chatterer the Red Squirrel became a crafty fisher, the footprints of Reddy Fox grew in size to those of a wolf, Peter Rabbit was transformed into his cousin of the north, Jumper the Hare, and a certain old black stump was Buster Bear.

But it was only once in a while that Tommy played the hunter. Somehow, since he had learned so many things about the lives of the little feathered and furred people about him, he cared less and less about hunting them. So most often, when the Green Forest became the Great Woods, he was Buster Bear. That was more fun than being a hunter, much more fun. There was only one drawback — he didn't know as much about Buster Bear and his ways as he wished he did.

So now, as he trudged along towards the pasture to drive home the cows for the evening milking, his thoughts were straying to the Great Woods and Buster Bear. As he came to the old wishing-stone he glanced up at the sun. There was no need to hurry. He would have plenty of time to sit down there a while. So down he sat on the big gray rock and his thoughts went straying, straying deep into the Great Woods far from cows and milking and the woodpile just beyond the kitchen door. Bears never had to chop wood.

"I wish," said Tommy dreamily, "that I were a bear."

That was all, just a little spoken wish, but Tommy was no longer a dreamy boy with evening chores yet to be done. He was a little black furry

animal, not unlike an overgrown puppy, following at the heels of a great gaunt black bear. In short, Tommy was a bear himself. All about him was the beautiful wilderness, the Great Woods of his boyish dreams. Just behind him was another little bear, his twin sister, and the big bear was their mother.

Presently they came to an opening where there were no trees, but a tangle of brush. Years before, fire had swept through there, though Tommy knew nothing about that. In fact, Tommy knew little about anything as yet save that it was good, oh, so good, to be alive. On the edge of this opening Mother Bear paused and sat up on her haunches while she sniffed the air. The two little bears did the same thing. They didn't know why, but they did it because Mother

Bear did. Then she dropped to all fours and told them to remain right where they were until she called them. They watched her disappear in the brush and waited impatiently. It seemed to them a very long time before they heard her call and saw her head above the bushes as she sat up, but really it was only a few minutes. Then they scampered to join her, each trying to be first.

When they reached her, such a glad sight as greeted them! All about were little bushes loaded with berries that seemed to have stolen their color from the sky. They were blueberries. With funny little squeals and grunts they stripped the berries from the bushes and ate and ate until they could eat no more. Then they wrestled with each other, and stood up on their hind legs and boxed

until they were out of breath and glad to lie down for a rest while Mother Bear continued to stuff herself with berries.

It was very beautiful there in the Great Woods, and the two little bears just bubbled over with high spirits. They played hide-and-seek behind stumps and trees. They played tag. They chased each other up tall trees. One would climb to the top of a tall stump, and the other would follow and try to knock the first one off.

Sometimes both would tumble down and land with a thump that would knock the breath from their little bodies. The bumps would hurt sometimes and make them squeal. This would bring Mother Bear in a hurry to see what had happened; and when she would find that no harm had come to them, she would

growl a warning and sometimes spank them for giving her a fright.

But best of all they loved to wrestle and box, and, though they didn't know it, they were learning something. They were learning to be quick in their movements. They were learning how to strike swiftly and how to dodge quite as swiftly. Once in a while they would stand and not try to dodge, but see who could stand the hardest blow. And once in a while, I am sorry to say, they quarreled and fought. Then Mother Bear would take a hand and cuff and spank them until they squalled.

Very early they learned that Mother Bear was to be minded. Once she sent them up a tree and told them to stay there until she returned. Then she went off to investigate something which

interested her. When she returned, the two little cubs were nowhere to be seen. They had grown tired of waiting for her to return and had come down to do a little investigating of their own. It didn't take her long to find them. Oh, my, no! And when she did — well, all the neighbors knew that two little cubs had disobeyed, and two little cubs were sure, very sure, that they never would do so again. Tommy was one.

At first, during those lovely summer days, Mother Bear never went far from them. You see, when they were very small, there were dangers. Oh, yes, there are dangers even for little bears. Tufty the Lynx would have liked nothing better than a meal of tender young bear, and Howler the Wolf would have rejoiced in an opportunity to snatch one

of them without the risk of an encounter with Mother Bear.

But Tommy and his sister grew fast, very fast. You see, there were so many good things to eat. Their mother dug for them the most delicious roots, tearing them from the ground with her great claws. It wasn't long before they had learned to find them for themselves and to dig them where the earth was soft enough. Then there were berries, raspberries and blackberries and blueberries, all they wanted, to be had for the gathering. And by way of variety there were occasional fish.

Tommy as a boy was very fond of fishing. As a bear he was quite as fond of it. On his first fishing-trip he got a wetting, a spanking, and no fish. It happened this way: Mother Bear had led

them one moonlight night to a brook they never had visited before. Up the brook she led them until they reached a place where it was broad and shallow, the water gurgling and rippling over the stones and singing merrily. They were left in the brush on the edge of the brook where they could see and were warned to keep still and watch. Then Mother Bear stationed herself at a point where the water was just a wee bit deeper than elsewhere and ran a wee bit faster, for it had cut a little channel there. For a long time she sat motionless, a big black spot in the moonlight, which might have been a stump to eyes which had not seen her go there.

Tommy wondered what it all meant. For a long time, at least it was a long time to Tommy, nothing happened.

The brook gurgled and sang and Mother Bear sat as still as the very rocks. Tommy began to get impatient. He was bubbling over with high spirits and sitting still was hard, very hard.

Little by little he stole nearer to the water until he was on very edge right behind Mother Bear. Then he caught a splash down the brook. He looked in that direction but could see nothing. Then there was another splash. He saw a silvery line and then made out a moving form. There was something alive coming up the brook. He edged over a little farther to see better. There it was, coming nearer and nearer. Though he didn't know it then, it was a big trout working its way up the brook to the spring-holes higher up where the water was deep and cold.



For a long time Mother Bear sat motionless



*Another shooting pain in one ear brought
another squeal*

In the shallowest places the fish was sometimes half out of water. It was making straight for the little channel where Mother Bear sat. Nearer it came. Suddenly Mother Bear moved. Like lightning one of her big paws struck down and under, scooping the trout out and sending it flying towards the shore.

Alas for Tommy! He was directly in the way. The fish hit him full in the face, fell back in the water, wriggled and jumped frantically—and was gone. Tommy was so startled that he gave a frightened little whimper. And then a big black paw descended and sent him rolling over and over in the water. Squalling lustily, wet, frightened and miserable, Tommy scrambled to his feet

and bolted for the shore where he hid in the brush.

"I didn't mean to!" he kept whimpering as he watched Mother Bear return to her fishing. Presently another trout came along and was sent flying up on the shore. Then Tommy watched his obedient sister enjoy a feast while he got not so much as a taste.

After that they often went fishing on moonlight nights. Tommy had learned his lesson and knew that fish were the reward of patience, and it was not long before he was permitted to fish for himself.

Sometimes they went frogging along the marshy shores of a little pond. This was even more fun than fishing. It was great sport to locate a big frog by the sound of his deep bass voice and then

softly steal up and cut a "chugarum" short, right in the middle. Then when he had eaten his fill, it was just as much fun to keep on hunting them just to see them plunge with long frightened leaps into the water. It tickled Tommy immensely, and he would hunt them by the hour just for this.

One day Mother Bear led them to an old dead tree half rotted away at the bottom. While they sat and looked on in round-eyed wonder, she tore at the rotten wood with her great claws. Almost at once the air about her was full of insects humming angrily. Tommy drew nearer. A sharp pain on the end of his nose made him jump and squeal. Another shooting pain in one ear brought another squeal and he slapped at the side of his head. One of those hum-

ming insects dropped at his feet. It must be that it had had something to do with that pain.

Tommy beat a retreat into the brush. But Mother Bear kept on clawing at the tree, growling and whining and stopping now and then to slap at the insects about her. By and by the tree fell with a crash. It partly split when it struck the ground. Then Mother Bear put her great claws into the crack and tore the tree open, for you know she was very strong. Tommy caught a whiff of something that made his mouth water. Never in all his short life had he smelled anything so delicious. He forgot all about the pain in his nose and his ear and came out of his hiding-place. Mother Bear thrust a great paw into the tree and tore out a piece of something yellow and

dripping and tossed it in Tommy's direction.

There were a lot of those insects crawling over it, but Tommy didn't mind. The smell of it told him that it must be the best thing that ever was, better than berries, or fish, or frogs, or roots. And with the first taste he knew that his nose had told the truth. It was honey! It didn't take Tommy a minute to gobble up honey, comb, bees and all. Then, heedless of stings, he joined Mother Bear. What were a few stings compared to such delicious sweets? So he learned that hollow trees are sometimes of interest to bears. They ate and ate until Tommy's little stomach was swelled out like a little balloon. Then they rolled on the ground to crush the bees clinging to their fur, after which

Mother Bear led them to a muddy place on the shore of a little pond, and the cool mud took out the fire of the stings. Later, Tommy learned that not all bee-trees could be pulled down in this way, but that sometimes they must be climbed and ripped open with the claws of one paw while he held on with the other and endured the stings of the bees as best he could. But the honey was always worth all it cost to get.

Next to feasting on honey Tommy enjoyed most a meal of ants, particularly red ants; and this seems queer, because red ants are as sour as honey is sweet. But it was so. Any kind of ants were easier to find and to get than honey. The latter he had only once in a while, but ants he had every day. He found them, thousands of them, under and in

rotting old logs and in decayed old stumps. He seldom passed an old log without trying to roll it over. If he succeeded, he was almost sure to find a frightened colony of ants rushing about frantically. A few sweeps of his long tongue, a smacking of his lips and he moved on.

Sometimes he found grubs of fat beetles, and these, though not so good as the ants, were always acceptable on his bill of fare. And he dearly loved to hunt wood-mice. It was almost as much fun as fishing or frogging.

So the long summer passed happily, and Tommy grew so fast that presently he became aware that not even Tufty the Lynx willingly crossed his path. He could go and come unafraid of any of the wilderness dwellers and forgot

what fear was until a never-forgotten day in the early fall.

He had followed Mother Bear to a certain place where late blueberries still clung to the bushes. As she reached the edge of the opening, she stopped short and lifted her nose, wrinkling the skin of it as she tested the air. Tommy did the same. He had great faith in what his nose could tell him. The wind brought to him now a strange smell unlike any he had known, an unpleasant smell. Somehow, he didn't know why, it gave him a queer prickly feeling all over.

He looked at Mother Bear. She was staring out into the blueberry patch, and her lips were drawn back in an ugly way, showing her great teeth. Tommy looked out in the berry-patch. There

were two strange two-legged creatures, gathering berries. They were not nearly as big as Mother Bear and they didn't look dangerous. He stared at them curiously. Then he turned to look at Mother Bear. She was stealing away so silently that not even a leaf rustled. She was afraid!

Tommy followed her, taking care not to make the least sound. When they were at a safe distance, he asked what it meant. "Those were men," growled Mother Bear deep down in her throat, "and that was the man-smell. Whenever you smell that, steal away. Men are the only creatures you have to fear; but whatever you do, keep away from them. They are dangerous."

After that, Tommy continually tested the air for the dreaded man-smell. Sev-

eral times he caught it. Once from a safe hiding-place he watched a fisherman and another time a party of campers, but he took care that they should not suspect that he was near. By late fall he was so big that he began to feel independent and to wander off by himself. Almost every day he would stand up to a tree, reach as far up as he could, and dig his claws into the bark to see how tall he was.

With the falling of the beechnuts Tommy found a new and delicious food and stuffed himself. These days he roamed far and wide and explored all the country for miles around. He grew fat and, as the weather grew colder, his coat grew thicker. He learned much about his neighbors and their ways, and his sense of humor led him often to give

them scares just for the fun of seeing them jump and run.

With the coming of the first snow a strange desire to sleep stole over him. He found a great tree which had been torn up by the roots in some wind storm and about which smaller trees had fallen, making a great tangle. Under the upturned roots of the great tree was a hollow, and into this he scraped leaves and the branches of young balsams which he broke off. Thus he made a comfortable bed and with a sigh of contentment lay down to sleep.

The snow fell and drifted over his bedroom, but he knew nothing of that. The cold winds, the bitter winds, swept through the wilderness, and the trees cracked with the cold, but Tommy slept on. Days slipped into weeks and weeks

into months and still he slept. He would not waken until gentle spring melted the snow unless —

“Moo-oo!”

Tommy's eyes flew wide open. For a full minute he stared blinkerily out over the Green Meadows. Then with a jump he came to his feet. “My gracious, it's getting late, and those cows are wondering what has become of me!” he exclaimed. He hurried toward the pasture, breaking into a run, for it was milking-time. But his thoughts were far away. They were in the Great Woods. “I've been a bear!” he exclaimed triumphantly, “and I know just how he lives and feels, and why he loves the Great Woods so. Of all the creatures I've been since I found out about the old wishing-stone, I'd rather be Bus-

ter Bear than any one, next to being just what I am. He has more fun than any one I know of and nothing and nobody to fear but man."

Tommy's brow clouded for an instant. "It's a shame," he blurted out, "that every living thing is afraid of man! And — and I guess it's his own fault. They needn't ever be afraid of me. I can tell them that! That old wishing-stone has taught me a lot, and I am never going to forget how it feels to be hunted and afraid all the time."

And Tommy never has.





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